

**KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN
APPENDIX 2
PUBLIC INFORMATION**

PRIMARY AGENCY	King County Executive's Office
SUPPORT AGENCIES	Department of Executive Services Department of Community and Human Services Department of Natural Resources and Parks Seattle-King Department of Public Health Department of Transportation Department of Development and Environmental Services Department of Judicial Administration Department of Adult & Juvenile Detention King County Sheriff's Office

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Purpose

The purpose of this appendix is to establish uniform policies for the effective development, coordination, and dissemination of information to the public in case of natural or technological emergency or disaster. This appendix has been prepared to be consistent with the Washington State Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan and the Federal Response Plan format for emergencies and disasters.

B. Scope

King County Government's public information requirements will be determined by the severity of the disaster or emergency as determined by the King County Emergency Coordination Center (ECC). A significant public information response will involve many King County Departments, cities, special purpose districts, nonprofit and business organizations, Washington State and possibly federal agencies. This appendix describes those agencies and their responsibilities and relationships.

II. POLICIES

During disasters the flow of public information and facts concerning the event and government's response to save lives and protect property must be consolidated. The descriptions provided the public must reflect the best information available. The best information source for King County Government is the King County ECC. In order to staff the PIO function on a 24-hour basis for a sustained period of time, professional PIOs from King County Government, augmented by other trained personnel, need to work in a consolidated Joint Information Center (JIC).

During any activation of the ECC, King County Public Information Officers for individual departments must be available to staff the ECC, field locations, or a Joint Information Center (JIC). The disaster procedures for each county department should anticipate this fact and build in appropriate staffing.

III. SITUATION

A. Emergency/Disaster Conditions and Hazards

King County will periodically experience emergency situations that require the dissemination of critical information to the public. The means of dissemination include the news media (radio, television, cable, print), and the Internet. Potential emergency situations include both natural and technologically caused events. Public information is critical to alerting citizens to an impending emergency, directing and informing them during the emergency, and assisting them in the response and recovery phases of the event.

B. Planning Assumptions

The Emergency Alert System (EAS) (See ESF-2) is the best means to give a rapid, initial warning to the public. It will be used in time sensitive, life threatening situations when the public must be warned immediately of an impending emergency or disaster.

Once the initial warning is accomplished, the PIOs have the task of keeping the public informed of what to do to prevent injury or property damage, and what actions county government is taking.

Normal means of communications may not be available. In those situations, non-traditional means of communicating with the public must be established and utilized.

Depending on the nature and magnitude of the emergency, different levels of public information will be required. Public information may in fact be the primary function occurring during an emergency.

This may happen when, because of media coverage, the public perceives there to be a bigger story than there actually is.

Rumors or misinformation can cause unnecessary distress among citizens, provoke counter productive public actions, and impede response and recovery efforts. PIOs must focus on stopping these rumors and providing accurate and timely information using all dissemination methods.

IV. CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

A. General

King County Government will prepare and distribute disaster information to the public before, during, and after disaster and emergency events, using all available media. Public information will be phased in accordance with the size and scope of the emergency or disaster. The initial response will normally be covered by operating the public information function from the King County ECC, with the Executive's Communications Director assembling a team of departmental PIOs. Because of the nature of the incident(s), a PIO team may need to be dispatched to deal with the media at the scene of an incident in support of an Incident Commander. In a large-scale disaster, the PIO function will be conducted from a Joint Information Center (JIC) that includes other non-King County jurisdictions. These may include, but are not limited to cities, special purpose districts, nonprofit organizations such as the American Red Cross, other counties, state and federal representatives, utilities and business and industry. The purpose of the JIC is not to control the activities of other jurisdictions, but to provide a forum for the sharing of information between jurisdictions and a central point for the media to get information.

Concurrent with the establishment of the PIO function at the EOC, the King County Executive's Community Relations Director will, when required, establish a Citizen Information Hotline. This 1-800 Hotline will be used to provide timely and accurate information on what King County, state and federal governments are doing to respond to citizens' needs. This Hotline will be supervised by the Director of Community Relations and staffed by King County departments. The Hotline may operate from the ECC, but may also be co-located with the JIC, or in another facility. An active liaison will be required between the ECC and the Public Information function to ensure that the information being disseminated is consistent between the three entities.

B. Organization

The County Executive's Communications Director is the lead PIO in the event of any activation of the ECC. Control of the Public Information function will be directed by the King County Executive or his designee. All PIO actions will be coordinated with the ECC via the ECC Supervisor or his designee.

During any activation of the ECC, King County Public Information Officers are no longer available to serve the needs of their individual departments. Instead, they must be available to staff the ECC, field locations, or a Joint Information Center (JIC). If individual departments need specific public information support, it will be provided on a prioritized basis by the PIO team at the ECC.

C. Procedures

Detailed information on Citizen Information Hotline, or JIC operations are found in the King County Joint Information Center Procedures Manual.

Having a public information plan that is executed by a well-trained staff will mitigate the confusion that normally occurs in disaster situations. Participation in regularly scheduled disaster exercises will train the cadre of personnel needed for larger scale events.

Personnel must be identified by their parent departments and designated as PIO, community-relations staff, or general support for the JIC function. They will be used on a consolidated basis during emergencies and disasters. PIO and Citizen Information Hotline teams will participate in training and ECC exercises in order to improve and maintain their skills. The media will be contacted and informed on how information will be disseminated during emergencies.

During the response phase of the disaster event, the PIO Team and Citizens Hotline Team will coordinate the dissemination of all disaster information. The PIO Team will provide public information news to the media via news releases, news conferences, and media telephone inquiries. Information will also be provided directly to the public via the Internet using King County and other joint regional public information sites. The Citizen Hotline will provide current disaster information to citizens who call with questions.

The public information program will continue through the recovery period, providing information and instructions about county, state and federal government emergency operations, future plans for restoration of disaster effected areas, and instructions on how to apply for federal disaster assistance programs administered by the state.

V. RESPONSIBILITIES

A. Primary Agency

The County Executive's Office shall:

Organize and coordinate the emergency public information program for the county, to include the preparation and maintenance of a JIC procedures manual.

Conduct training for County department personnel whose normal duties do not include Citizen Information Hotline or PIO functions.

Establish and coordinate procedures and the use of designated facilities by the King County PIO Team during emergencies and disasters.

Provide trained PIO staff that can independently set up and operate the Joint Information Center when it is activated.

Organize and coordinate the Citizen Information Hotline for the county.

Establish and coordinate procedures and the use of designated facilities by the King County Citizen Information Hotline during emergencies and disasters.

B. Support Agencies

Department of Executive Services shall:

Provide technical advice and training on ECC procedures to PIO and JIC staff.

All County departments shall:

Provide PIO staff to the ECC/JIC when requested by the Executive's Communications Director.

VI. RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS

Pre-designated facilities and equipment have been identified to support the PIO function during disasters. Seattle-King Chapter of the American Red Cross will provide translator services when required.

VII. REFERENCES

King County Public Information Officer, Emergency Information Guide
King County Joint Information Center Procedures Manual dtd 7-2-99